The Beautiful Race of The South Seas Is Being Exterminated by Civilization

IN the group picture the islanders are shown doing the upaupahura or hula on the beach of Marquesas. The individual pictures are photographs of two of the island beauties

THE call of a dying race has again come to Frederick O'Brien. Seeker after remote places, adventurer, wanderer, author and bachelor—he says one must be that to succeed at the rest—he has heard it even amid the rattle and bang of elevated trains, the whistle of traffic cops, the clangor of the money-makers and the hurly-burly of everyday life in a big city.

He is going back to have a last look at the Marquesans — that strange "white-tawny" people who, some time in the infancy of the world, migrated "from Ireland, perhaps," across the "land bridge which stretches its crippled body along the floor of the Pacific" and are now in the throes of their final struggle for existence, far away under the glow of the Southern Cross.

The Marquesas Islands lie midway between South America and Australia, in the South Pacific Ocean. They comprise a group of thirteen patches belonging to France. Here dwell, or dwelt, a race of magnificent men and beautiful women who among whalers, sea traders and early adventurers bore the reputation of cannibals, but whom O'Brien learned to regard in a more kindly light.

The Last Remnant

Wearing only a loin cloth, he lived for a year among the reformed man eaters, unreformed wild women, lepers, derelicts, mosquitoes and devout French priests, and now that the call has come to him again, conveying the news that a terrible epidemic had all but wiped out the "last remnant of the remnant," he is going to go back to live with them again before they are finally exterminated from the list of peoples inhabiting the globe.

"We are gone," a letter written to him by the "Ghost Girl," one of the young women he met in the islands, said. "Now has come the last plague to kill us. Many of the people you knew in the valley are dead. No more children are being born. There is no more hope for us, dear friend. We are as a people already dead."

O'Brien has a constitutional antipathy to what he calls "being taken too seriously." But there was a touch of genuine regret and sympathy in his voice when, on a recent visit to New York, he read the letter from the "Ghost Girl."

Explaining his own love for distant adventures and alien scenes, he said:

The Wanderlust

"There is in the nature of every man, I firmly believe, a longing to see and know the strange places of the world. Life imprisons us all in its coil of circumstance and the dreams of romance that color boyhood are forgotten, but they do not die.

"They stir at the sight of a white sailed ship beating out to the wide sea; the smell of tarred rope or a blackened wharf or the touch of the cool breeze that stirs when the stars come out will waken them again."

"Somewhere over the rim of the world lies romance, and every heart yearns to find it."

Having thus explained his credo of life, Mr. O'Brien went on to tell of his adventures during his first quest of the "rainbow's end" and of the strange people and still stranger adventures he encountered there.

Found 300 Years Ago

O'Brien's theory is that the Marquesans are the remnants of a Caucasian race that had been isolated from the world through æons until they were found, three hundred years ago, by adventuring bands of traders and discoverers. That they are still very far off the regular routes is attested by the fact that it was twelve months after his arrival at the Atuona Valley, on the Island of Hiva-Oa, before another steamer arrived to take him back again to Tahiti, his starting point.

Remote though the people were from the seat of their ancestry, O'Brien discovered monuments, customs, hieroglyphics, graven images, legends and languages bearing testimony of the migration perhaps 100,000 years before. But he discovered other things, too, which are of almost equal interest and which he has described in his book, "White Shadows in the South Seas."

Among the Marquesans he found that it is the woman who is aggressive in wooing and not the man. These Amazons of the Pacific, many of them having red hair and wonderful features, made raids upon the "sterner sex" for husbands, and on three occasions O'Brien found to his embarrassment that every year is Leap Year in the Marquesas Islands.

Wife Objected

A native who, in a spirit of gratitude for favors done, offered to give his wife to the white traveler was severely pummeled by his mate, not because she was shocked by the character of the suggested arrangement, but because he had sought to usurp a prerogative she considered exclusively hers.

O'Brien also came into contact with one ex-cannibal who admitted without any signs of compunction that he had eaten one hundred human beings, but as against this he also encountered Mlle. N., the richest woman among the Marquesans, whom he described in this way:

"She wore a black lace gown, clinging and becoming her slender figure and delicately charming face. Her features were exquisite, her eyes lustrous black pools of passion, her mouth a scarlet line of pride and disdain. A large leghorn hat of fine black straw, with chiffon, was on her graceful head and her tiny feet were in silk stockings and patent leather. She held a gold and ivory prayer book in gloved hands and a jeweled watch hung upon her breast.

Couldn't Marry a Native

"She might have passed for a Creole or for one of those beautiful Filipino mestizas, daughters of Spanish fathers and Filipino mothers. I suppose coquetry in woman was born with the fig leaf. This dainty, fetching heiress, born of a French father and a savage mother, had all the graces of a ballroom belle."

"I want to be loved," this extraordinary creature told Mr. O'Brien one day on the edge of a precipice where they had gone to watch the sun set. "Money—I have it. I don't want it. I want a man. I cannot marry a native, for they do not think as I do."

Coming up a trail a few days later the traveler met a shabbily dressed white man, with a dirty gray beard and a harsh voice, who, after a life of piracy, robbery and lawlessness, had settled in the jungles.

"You be careful," this uninviting derelict told O'Brien, after having seen him with Mlle. N. "One time I baked bread in Taaoa. My oven was near the plantation. I saw that girl come into the woods and take off her dress. She had a mirror to see her back, and I looked, and the sun shone bright.

"What she saw I saw—a patch of white. She is a leper, that rich girl."

Strange Names

O'Brien went to the Cannibal Isles aboard a steamer which had also as a passenger the new French governor of the Marquesas. The natives among whom he found himself had strange names, such as "Man Who Was Roasted on a Stick," "Malicious Gossip," "Exploding Eggs," "The Seventh Man Who Wallows," and a girl of unusual beauty and charm whose name was "Vanquished Often."

"Vanquished Often was perhaps thirteen years old," said O'Brien, "with a grace of carriage, a beauty and a perfection of features, a richness of coloring no canvas could depict. Her skin was of warm olive hue, with tinges of red in the cheeks and the lips cherry ripe. Her eyes were dark brown, large, melting, childishly introspective. Her hands were shapely and her little bare feet, arched, rosy nailed, were like flowers on the sand. She wore the thinnest of sheer white cotton tunics and there were flamboyant flowers in the shining dark hair that tumbled to her waist."

Vanquished Often displayed all the artlessness of a child in her conduct, and on one occasion invited O'Brien to accompany her to the spring by the beach where the women went bathing.

A Charming Picture

"Vanquished Often, slipping from her white tunic, stepped beneath the crystal water and laughed at the cool delight of it on her smooth skin," he went on. It was a picture of which artists dream—the naked girl laughing in the torrents of transparent water, the wet crimson blossoms washing from her drowned hair, and beneath the striped shade of the palm trunks her simple, savage companions waiting their turn, squatting on the sand or crowded on the canoe, their loins wrapped in crimson and blue pareaus. Behind them all the mountain rose steeply, a mass of brilliant green jungle growth, and before them, across the rim of shining white sand, spread the wide, blue sea.

"Courtesy suggested that I should be the next to feel the refreshing current. We let slip the garment of timorous covering very easily when nudity is commonplace. Vai-Tahu (the name by which the little settlement was known) was to teach me to be modest without pother, to chat with those about me during my ablutions without concern for the false vanities of screens, or even the shelter of rocks. In such scenes one perceives that immodesty is in the false shame that makes one cling to clothes rather than in the simple virtues that walk naked and unashamed."

When O'Brien landed in the Marquesas he slept the first night in the Governor's palace. But as the slats gave way he found other quarters, buying from a trader on the ship which had brought him a brass bed which was ever after called by the natives "the golden bed." Its fame spread far and wide and the natives eagerly sought opportunities to gaze upon it.

An Idyllic Life

"Life in Vai-Tahu was idyllic," said O'Brien. "The whites, having desolated and depopulated this once thronged valley, had gone, leaving the remnant of its people to return to their native virtue and quietude. Here, perhaps, more than in any other spot in all the isles, the Marquesans lived as their forefathers had before the whites came.

"Doing nothing sweetly was an art in Vai-Tahu. Pleasure is nature's sign of approval. When man is happy he is in harmony with himself and his environment. The people of this quiet valley did not crave for excitement. The bustle and nervous energy of the white wearied them excessively. Time was never wasted, to their minds, for leisure was the measure of its value.

Divide Household Tasks

"Domestic details, the preparation of food, the care of children, the nursing of the sick, were the tasks of all the household. Husband and wife, or the mates unmarried, labored together in delightful unity. Often the woman accompanied her man into the forests, assisting in the gathering of the nuts and breadfruit, in the fishing and the building. When these duties did not occupy them, or when they were not together bathing in the river or at the via puna, they sat side by side in their paepaes in meditation.

"Before interference with their natural customs the Marquesans were communists to a large degree. Their only private property consisted of houses, weapons, ornaments and clothing, for the personal use of the owner himself.

"All large works, such as the erection of houses, the building of large canoes and, in the ancient days, the raising of paepaes and temples, were done by mutual coöperation, though each family provided its own food and made provision for the future by storing breadfruit in the popoi pits. In the old days a chief was often relegated to the ranks for failure in war, and always for an overbearing attitude toward the commoners. Such arrogant fellows were kicked out of the seat of power unceremoniously.

Artists Honored

"Men were honored for their artistry, highest place being given to the tattooers, carvers, the designers and builders of canoes, the doctors, architects and warriors. Men and women rose to influence and chief rank only by deeds that won popular admiration. These people were hero worshippers, and in the bloodiest of the old days those of fine soul, who had a message of entertainment or instruction, were sacred to all tribes, so they could travel anywhere in safety and were welcome guests in all homes."

But whereas the Marquesans were highly advanced along the lines of coöperative effort their marriage customs were, and are, according to O'Brien, not in harmony with those which are entertained in the more modern, civilized countries. The wooing is mostly done on the beaches, and the youth, finding a maiden to his liking, takes her to his home. In case the young woman does not please the youth's mother the girl is sent away the next morning and another girl is brought and the process is repeated.

"Cave Women"

After marriage, however, the Marquesan woman frequently denies to her husband the freedom she herself enjoys. This was brought home sharply to Haabuani, master of ceremonies at the dances, and the native who thought to confer a favor upon O'Brien by giving him his wife.

"If I have a friend, and he temporarily desires my wife, I am glad, if she is willing," Haabuani told O'Brien, "but my enemy shall not have that privilege with my consent. I would be glad to have you look upon her with favor. You are kind to me. You have treated me as a chief and you have bought my kava bowl. But my wife, Toho, does what she pleases, yet if I toss but a pebble in another pool, she is furious. See, I have the bruises still of her beating."

O'Brien told, also, of an encounter he had had with one of the women who selected him for her attentions. He met this woman on a mountain trail during one of his exploration expeditions.

"Perhaps a mile above the village, in a wilderness of shrubbery, trees and giant ferns, we came upon a cross trail, a thin line of travel hardly breaking the dense growth, and saw a woman appear from among the leaves.

"She was large, perhaps five feet ten inches tall; a Juno figure, handsome and lithe. Such a woman of her age, about twenty-two years, does the work of a man, making copra, fells trees, lifts heavy stones and is a match for the average man in strength.

An Island Juno

"She was dark, as are all Marquesans who live a hardy and vigorous outdoor life unsheltered from sun and wind, and in the half-shadow of the forest she seemed like an animal, wild and savage. Her scarlet pareau and necklace of red peppers added color to a picture that struck me at once as bizarre and memorable.

"The horse had passed her, and turning about in the saddle Orivie (O'Brien's companion) replied to her greeting while I added a courteour 'kaoha.' She looked at me with extraordinary attention, which I ascribed to my white ducks and traveling cap, while she asked who I was. Orivie replied that I was a stranger on my way over the mountain.

"She advanced into the main trail then, letting slip from her shoulders a weight of packages, and suddenly embraced me, smelling my face and picking me up in a bear hug that, startled as I was, nearly choked me.

"'Take care!' cried Orivie, in a tone between alarm and amusement. I backed hastily away, and sought to take refuge beside a boulder, but she vaulted after me, and, seizing me again, resumed her passionate attack.

"'She is a woman of the mountains. She will take you away to her paepae,' my excited guide yelled warningly.

An Attempted Kidnaping

"That was her intention. There was no doubt about it. She seized me by the arm and tried to drag me away from the boulder to which I clung. For several moments I was engaged in a struggle, more sincere than chivalrous on my part and ardently demonstrative on hers. But as I absolutely would not accede to her desire to give me a home in the hills, she was forced to give up hope after a final embrace, which I ended rudely but scientifically. Rising to her feet again, she picked up her burden, which must have weighed fully a hundred pounds, and went her way."

O'Brien's guide told him that all the women of the heights were like that. They had no consideration for the conventions as the whites know them, and would seize the men who attracted them as men sometimes do women. They will not take no for an answer, and if the men are not strong enough to re... them, will drag them away to th... mountain lairs.

"She would give you food a... treat you with kindness, as a m... does his bride," the guide t... O'Brien. "You know, in the old da... the strong women had more than o... husband; sometimes four or fi... and they chose them in this way."

O'Brien asked, somewhat ne... ously, it would appear, if the tr... he and his guide were pursuing h... anywhere near the mounta... woman's home.

"No," replied the guide.

"Then let us hasten onward," O'Brien replied.

Have Irish Traits

But such incidents as this fail... to destroy the admiration for t... Marquesans as a whole whi... O'Brien came to feel for them in hi... year's stay among them. He wa... constantly being reminded of thei... resemblance to their Caucasian fo... bears, and was particularly im... pressed by the traits which it seem... to him they must have inherite... from the Irish.

"They are beautiful in appearan... and beautiful in nature," he sa... "They are more like the Irish tha... any aborigines I have known. Th... are gentle and have a belief in th... supernatural which is an inhere... trait of the Celt.

"You may ask how I can say th... they are gentle and still be for... cannibals. The explanation is th... Cannibalism with them was not ... much an appetite for human fle... or an expression of cruelty, as ... was an expression of tribal pri... They ate their enemies, as some m... among us recently drank liquor, n... because they cared for it especiall... but as a social habit.

"In the relations between men a... women the conventions are not ... rigidly alhered to as among ma... other people. The Marquesan wom... is not the cold, chaste woman ... other climes; they have no barri... of reserve or haughtiness; th... make no bargains; they go whe... the heart goes, careless of certi... vows."

Language Dying, Too

O'Brien added that his task ... learning the Marquesan langua... had been simplified by the fact th... a "dying language is the inevita... concomitant of a dying people... That is, the fewer the people t... fewer their words.

"Language grows or shrinks wi... the number of people who speak it," he said. "Thus the French langua... will decrease because the Fren... people are growing fewer in nu... ber. The English language, on t... other hand, is constantly making a... ditions, because the English spea... ing people are becoming more a... more numerous. The number o... words always increases with m... extended usage, variety of life, e... etc.

"The Polynesian is of a dyi... race, and so for a century hi... language has been dying also. ... have dictionaries of all the Poly... nesian languages, but I find tha... two-thirds of the words are not u... derstood even by the surviving n... tives themselves.

"The words they have forgotte... are the high water marks showin... how far the national life has fallen... Some idea of the rapidity with whic... the Marquesans are vanishing ma... be gained from the fact that of th... hundreds of thousands formerly in... habiting the islands only about fi... hundred are left.

A Last Visit

"I am going back to have a la... look at them before they are go... entirely. The recent epidemic o... influenza hit the Marquesans hard... than it did, perhaps, many othe... people, and they died in droves. I... Tahiti, which is not in the Marqu... sas, but comparatively near by, th... people died so fast that their bodi... could not be buried, but were burne... in large pyres in the streets."

A party of New Yorkers is ... accompany O'Brien, at least as f... as Tahiti. Among them are Jerom... Blum, a painter, and his wife, Lu... cille, a sculptor; Lydia Mestre, ... painter and poet, and Harol... Mestre, her husband.

"They will live in Tahiti for ... while and try to find the spirit tha... Paul Gauguin found," said O'Brien... "They are not Greenwich Villager... but real producers. They want t... paint, sculpture and get at the so... of these people. So they are goin... with me and make their home i... Tahiti, for a time at least.

"Afterward they may, if the... think well of it, go on to the Mar... quesas."

A Shoe Shining Artist

DOMINIC is a bootblack. Most people would call him a "wop" if they referred to him at all, but, nevertheless, he is a shoe-shining artist. Horatio Alger might have made him the hero of a book except that in Dominic's case industry and application have failed to raise him above the level of his fellow shiners.

This paragon of brush wielders and a half dozen others are employed by the swarthy, fat proprietor of a marble bench, leather upholstered shoe-shining establishment in the basement of a lower Broadway skyscraper, a place where half the seats are "reserved for ladies"; which means the stenographers, filing clerks and telephone operators, who each day, in an express elevator, on company time, swoop down on the overworked shoe polishers and seek to have the suede of their high heeled, low quartered footgear rubbed smooth.

Can't Please Women

Dominic, however, pays little attention to these customers, because, as he says: "You can't please them frails." But let a man appear whose feet are encased in good shoes, articles costing from $20 to $50 a pair, and his black eyes light up. He is the acme of courteous attention.

When the customer is seated Dominic grasps the sole of one of the high priced shoes firmly in his calloused, blackened hands, gazes at it a moment and then begins to work. He applies some thick, pasty brown concoction of unidentified ingredients and then scrubs the leather vigorously. At the toes he is deliberate and methodical. He watches for tiny abrasions of the leather and moans when he discovers one. When he has scrubbed the shoe to his complete satisfaction he connects the electric dryer and hovers this over the shoe until its hot breath has dried the leather, showing the surface to be free from discolored splotches. Then he repeats the process with the other shoe.

Polish Like Glass

Finally, he applies the polishing paste and begins to polish. This, with Dominic, is a ceremony. He stands back from the shoe with his polishing rag held taut between his hands, staring with fascinated gaze at the dull, clean leather. Then abruptly he pounces on it and, with rapid seesawing of the bit of cloth, magically brings a mirror-like gloss to the leather. Perhaps he will deliberately destroy this gloss in the manner of a dissatisfied potter shattering an imperfect vase. If so, however, he will rub his fingers tenderly over the shoe and, holding his soiled neck at an angle, murmur some phrase of praise for the quality of the shoe, which to any normal male is subtle flattery.

Then, with a tweek at one trouser cuff, he induces the customer to dismount, and when that individual has his change in his hand to pay the petite, black-eyed cashier, daughter of the proprietor, Dominic exclaims: "How much better they look!"

The amount of pride generated by this final remark and its far-reaching influence on the lives of the customers could be measured only with some super-intelligent adding machine, but the number of nickel tips it wins for Dominic can be learned by totaling the number of his patrons. It is art for art's sake, plus.